CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Ravalli Electric Coop – McGee Buried Powerline
Proposed
Implementation Date: September 2018
Proponent: Ravalli County Electric Cooperative / Mark & Michele McGee
Location: Sections 26 & 27, T2N R19W.
County: Ravalli

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The granting of a 10-foot wide permanent easement for the installation and maintenance of a buried electric powerline approximately 5,048 feet long across state-owned trust lands within sections 26 & 27, T2N-R19W. The easement applicant is Ravalli Electric Cooperative. The power line is intended to provide electrical service to property owned by Mark & Michele McGee.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

The public comment period for this project occurred from July 9, 2018 through July 31, 2018 and was accomplished by:

1. Mailing of a Scoping Notice to the DNRC grazing licensee and to all (6) adjacent landowners.
2. Meeting with employees of the Bitterroot National Forest (and adjacent landowner who also has an application for this power line crossing federal property).
3. Posting a Scoping Notice on the DNRC website.

The DNRC received 2 comments in response to the Scoping Notice:

1. Ken Hayes (resident on Sawdust Gulch Rd.) inquired whether he would be able to access the utility line to provide power to his property as well. Ravalli County Electric informed him that they could tap into one of the junction boxes to run a utility line to his property. DNRC informed Mr. Hayes that, depending on the location of the junction box, an additional easement may be necessary from DNRC to bury additional cable through state-owned trust lands.
2. Paul Nelson with Shining Mountain Ranch (DNRC grazing lessee) was not opposed to the project. However, they did request that any fencing that is disturbed be repaired immediately upon completion of the project.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

An authorization will also be needed to cross federal property (Bitterroot National Forest) to connect to the Cameron Creek (County) road.

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

Ravalli Electric Coop (REC) has been requested by Mark and Michele McGee to construct power to their property located at 676 Pasture Draw in Sula, MT. Multiple routes were considered for this project. Ultimately, the best (Action Alternative) route chosen follows Forest Service Road 73206 (Sawdust Gulch) through land owned by the State of Montana. The proposed route was chosen because it is the most direct and shortest route along previously disturbed ground (Sawdust Gulch road and an unnamed logging road).

Two alternatives are considered for this project-

The No Action Alternative-the DNRC would deny Ravalli Electric Coop's request for permanent easement.

The Action Alternative- the DNRC would grant Ravalli Electric Coop's request for a permanent easement with provisions which would protect the DNRC's property rights and mitigate any potential impacts to resources within the easement.
The proposed route crosses two state-owned trust land parcels for a total length of approximately 5,048 feet (see attached maps). Overall, REC is requesting a 10-foot wide easement to cross these parcels with an underground electric line. The underground primary conductor would be 1/0 aluminum placed in a 3-inch diameter high density polyethylene (HDPE) conduit pipe. The conduit would be placed by "plowing in" roughly 800-foot sections at a time with a pipe puller mounted on a D-7 bull dozer. The conduit would be placed approximately 36-inches below the existing ground surface. The project would also include installation of 6 green junction boxes placed approximately 820-feet apart on the State land.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

The Sawdust Gulch Road is located on erosive granitic soil material and is badly rutted/gullied on Bitterroot NF land (Ruts are too deep for a car to navigate). The portion of the Sawdust Gulch road on state trust lands is in much better condition, however some of the drain dips have filled in and are no longer functioning. The unnamed logging road is closed to motorized traffic and is well vegetated with very few ruts/gullies.

- Preventative maintenance is needed on the Sawdust Gulch to clear material from existing drain dips so that water is diverted off the road surface rather than allowing it to run down the road for extended distances and erode the traveled way.
- The unnamed logging road should remain closed to public motorized travel to minimize erosion, reduce the need for periodic road maintenance, minimize the spread of noxious weeds, and to provide wildlife security.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged

If the Action Alternative is selected, the easement would be granted on existing roads, stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation as directed by DNRC to minimize erosion and creation of a potential seedbed for noxious weed establishment; (2) wash equipment to

remove potential noxious weed seed prior to entry into the area; and (3) to re-install the berm closing the unnamed logging road to public motorized use upon completion of powerline installation.

Mitigations - stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation as directed by DNRC to minimize erosion and potential seedbeds for noxious weed establishment; (2) wash equipment to remove potential noxious weed seed prior to entry into the area; and (3) to re-install an effective berm closing the unnamed logging road to public motorized use upon completion of powerline installation.

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5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

If the Action Alternative is selected, the easement would be granted on existing roads. There would be limited minor impacts to these resources.

Mitigations- - Stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation as directed by DNRC to minimize erosion and potential seedbeds for noxious weed establishment and; (2) to re-install an effective berm closing the unnamed logging road to public motorized use upon completion of powerline installation.

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6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

If the Action Alternative is selected, a buried power line easement would be granted under existing roads. It is not anticipated that any activities associated with the installation and use of the proposed buried power line easement on DNRC ownership would result in significant amounts of particulate matter.

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7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

If the Action Alternative is selected, the easement would be granted on existing roads so there would be limited, minor impacts to these resources. Should the easement be granted, the use of existing roads might require minor roadside brushing which would have minor impacts on these resources.

Mitigations- - Stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation as directed by DNRC to minimize erosion and potential seedbeds for noxious weed establishment and; (2) to re-install an effective berm closing the unnamed logging road to public motorized use upon completion of powerline installation.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

The two 80-acre state trust land parcels involved in this proposal are primarily surrounded by private lands. The state properties are a mixture of dry forest vegetation dominated by open stands of Ponderosa pine, and open grasslands. The forested land tends to be in stringers following drainage bottoms and north facing aspects.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Should the Action Alternative be selected, no change in vegetation would occur. Due to the relatively open nature of the land, there is a concern for big game security associated with open roads. Following installation of the buried power line, the road closure berm at the start of the un-named logging road would be re-installed to close the area to public motorized use.

Mitigation- Following installation of the buried power line, the road closure berm at the start of the un-named logging road would be re-installed to close the area to public motorized use.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

A records search of the Montana Natural heritage website for threatened or endangered animal species within Township 2 North - Range 19 West was performed. Bull Trout was the only animal species listed as present. A records search of the Montana Natural heritage website for threatened or endangered plant species within Township 2 North - Range 19 West was performed. No threatened or endangered plant species were found within this township. Four "plant species of concern" were identified within this township as follows: Colville Indian Paintbrush, Lemhi Beardstounge, Small Onion and Pointed Broom Sedge.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Should the Action Alternative be selected, there would be no anticipated impacts to Bull Trout as the project does not involve activities adjacent to or crossing of any perennial streams. Since no threatened or endangered plant species were identified to exist within this township and disturbance is limited to existing (disturbed) roads, no impacts threatened or endangered or to plant species of concern are anticipated

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. Because the area of potential effect on state land is fully disturbed (roads), no additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative minor soil disturbance would occur associated with burying the electric power line. Because this work would be done within the bed existing roads, the visual impacts of soil disturbance impacts would be minor. The primary visual impact of the proposal would be the installation of 6 green junction boxes along the outside edge (fill side) of the road. These junction boxes would be spaced approximately 820 feet apart and would be installed at wide spots in the roadway.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, commercial electric power would be provided to a residence without commercial power. Minor impacts would occur to the affected properties as the power line would be underground. Powerline installation may result in an increased potential for adjacent properties currently without power to connect to this line.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

N/A

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Under the No Action Alternative, the would be no change to human health and safety.

Selection of the Action Alternative would not be expected to cause any substantial change to human health and safety risks within the project area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Under the No Action Alternative, no change in Industrial, commercial and agricultural activities and production the condition is anticipated.

Under the Action Alternative, because all the power line route is under existing roads, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged. There is a concern that the junction boxes not be placed in locations that would narrow the width of roadways and impair their use for commercial logging. There is also a concern that junction boxes not be placed in locations that would impair use of existing road drainage features.
Powerline installation may result in an increased potential for adjacent properties currently without power to connect to this line.

Mitigations: - Junction boxes should not be placed in locations that would narrow the width roadways and impair their use for commercial logging. Junction boxes should not be placed in locations that would impair the effectiveness of existing road drainage features

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16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

Under the No Action Alternative, the quantity and distribution of employment would be expected to remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, there would be a minor direct short-term increase in employment associated with the installation of the underground electric distribution line. Work is estimated to take 3 weeks work for a 4-person crew.

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17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no change to the local and state tax base and tax revenues.

Under the Action Alternative, very little change to the local and state tax base and tax revenues.is anticipated.

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18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

Under the No Action Alternative, the demand for government services would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, the demand for government services is expected to remain unchanged.

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19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

N/A

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20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The two parcels of state trust land do receive some limited recreational use primarily in the form of hiking and big game hunting. The un-named logging road is currently closed (bermed) to minimize motorized public use. Due to each parcel's relatively small size (80 acres each) and because they are bounded by private lands use is limited. These parcels do not provide access to other public lands or to wilderness areas.

Under the No Action Alternative, recreational activities would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, recreational activities would remain unchanged.

Mitigation- Following installation of the buried power line, the road closure berm at the start of the un-named logging road would be re-installed to close the area to public motorized use.

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21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, there would be a slightly increased potential of new housing/development of adjacent private lands due to the improved availability of commercial power. The McGee's (proponents) are currently constructing a residence on their property.

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22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

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23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

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24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would not be any return to the Common Schools Trust.

Using an estimated land value of $1500/acre and an area of 1.16 acres for the proposed easement, selection of the Action Alternative would return approximately $1,740 to the Common Schools Trust.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name: Robert H Storer**	**Date: July 26, 2018**
	Title: Trust Lands Program Manager – SWLO	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I select the Action Alternative with the mitigations noted above. This alternative provides commercial power desired by the McGee's while providing compensation (revenue) to the common school trust and contains mitigations to address concerns noted in the Environmental Assessment.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

I find the impacts associated with implementation are not significant.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ] EIS [ ] More Detailed EA [X] No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Thayer Jacques
	Title:	Hamilton Unit Forester
Signature: Thayer Jacques	**Date:**	7/25/2018

DS-252 Version 6-2003

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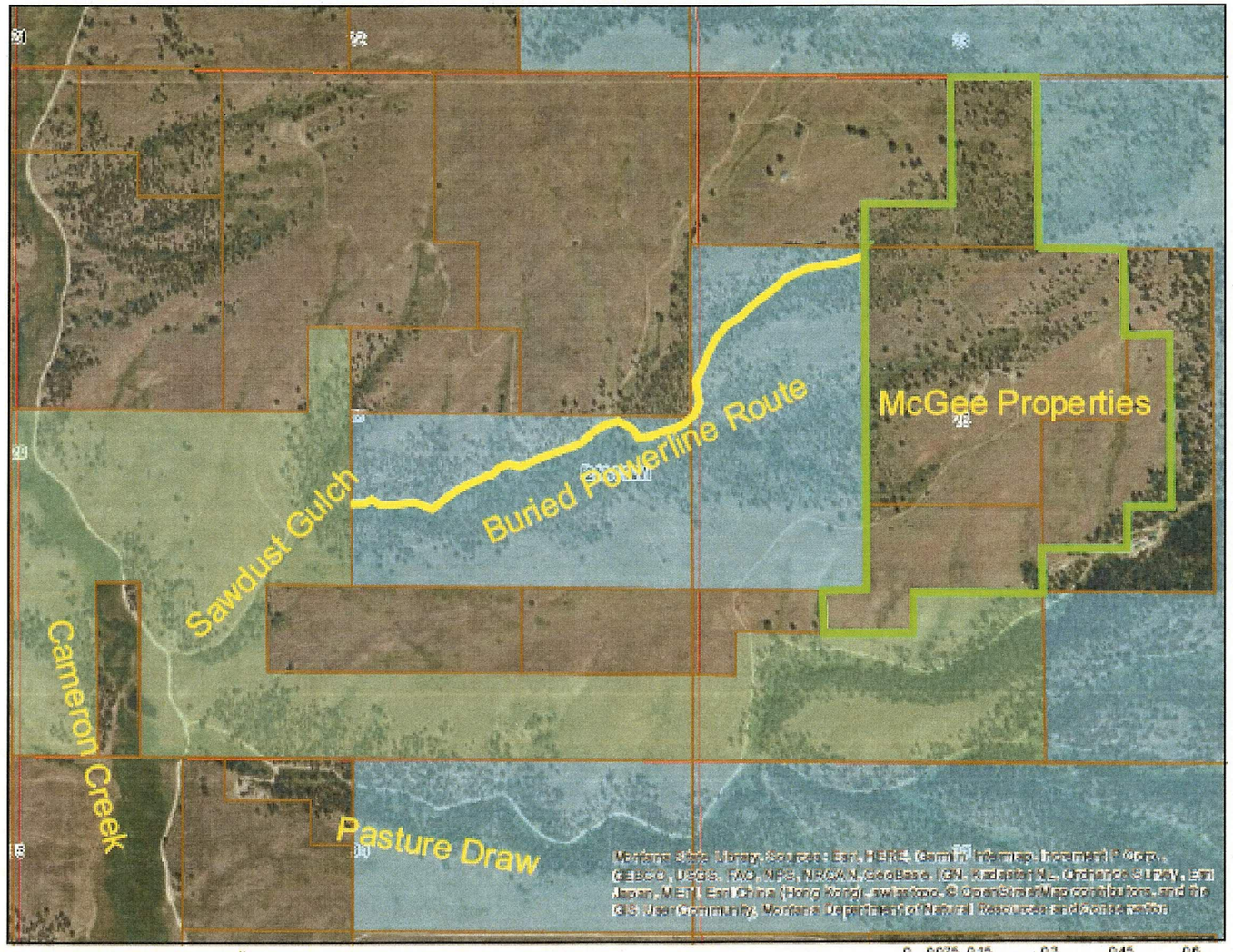
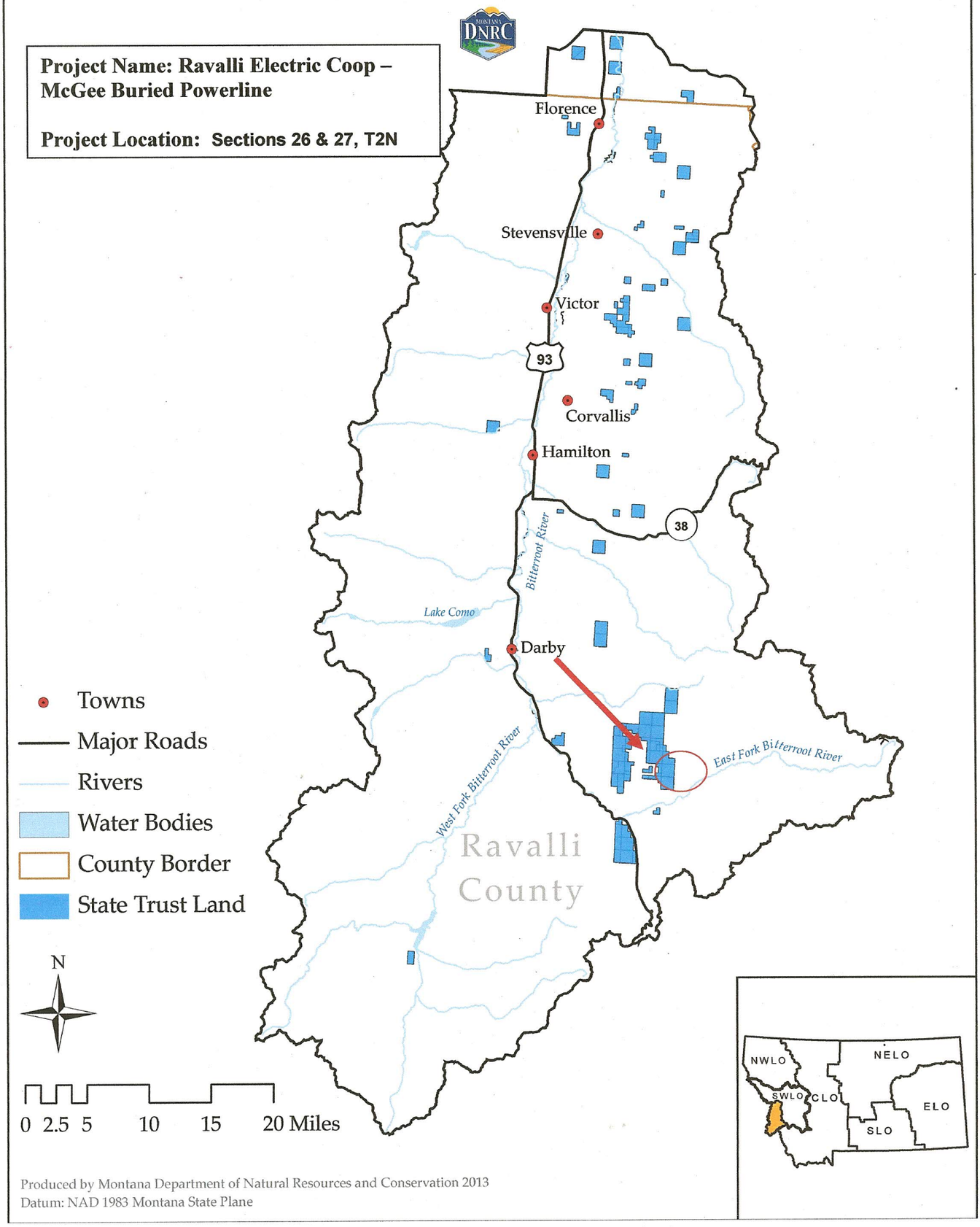
Ravalli Electric Coop - Easement Application



Ravalli Electric Coop – McGee Buried Powerline VICINITY MAP
HAMILTON UNIT

Project Name: Ravalli Electric Coop – McGee Buried Powerline

Project Location: Sections 26 & 27, T2N



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Datum: NAD 1983 Montana State Plane